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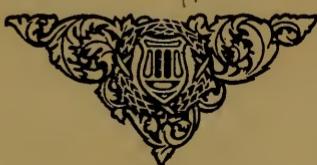




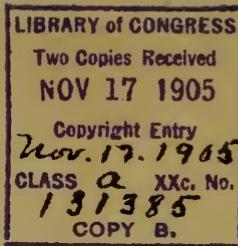
Ernest M. Gaffey

Sonnets to a Wife

By Ernest McGaffey.



Saint Louis
William Marion Reedy
1905



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By ERNEST McGAFFEY**

For Cecile

Foreword

TRUE poetry needs not to be explained. It goes direct from poet's to reader's heart. The seventy sonnets in this little book have this quality of clearness and directness. They are easily understood of the people and yet they have a charm as well even for the literary gourmet. They are always simple. They are always sweet, and yet we cannot say that they are too much sugar'd.

Our poet surely does not "tear a passion to tatters" in his song, and while we may acknowledge that the sonnet form is one that forbids abandonment to fine frenzies, being in its nature repressive of exuberances, it must be clear to any reader of this sequence that its underlying note is that of a passion of exalted reserve. The love here expressed is of that reticently strong sort which characterizes the Anglo-Saxon. The passion is strong and deep: it is never spectacular: it is not fantastic, whimsical. This poet aims not to make an effect soely, to turn the raptures and sorrows, the hopes and fears, the wistfulness of his spirit into startling

copy. He writes as one fulfilled of reverence before the great boon and mystery of a woman's love. The impression he gives us is of the sanctity of a relationship in which, nevertheless, there is full recognition of the element other than spiritual which must go to the making of a perfect marriage. Here are blended the charm of Phyllis, Phryne and Penelope, the grosser passion, of which so much modern writing is obsessed, being, however, left in the obscurity to which modern reserve has relegated it as something taken for granted, beautiful in its essence, but soiled and spoiled by being made familiar to the many.

Mr. McGaffey makes his sonnets a continuous hymn of the beautiful in Nature, and of that beauty, with its subtle, pervading sense of pathetic impermanence, as interpreting and interpreted by the sane and sacred love between a man and a woman. The clean atmosphere of the open world is in every sonnet. All the airs of heaven blow pureness about these lovers. We have no trace of contemporary materialistic views of love, no insistence upon the fascination of a rampant, savage, physically clamorous muliebrity. The spiritual signifi-

cance of the great Nature, of which husband and wife and their love for one another are a part, is always strongly suggested and this without cant either of orthodoxy or of the dolorous minor poet always lamenting the inevitable, immitigable loss of himself to the world. There is no negation here. Every line repudiates "the spirit which denies." The joy of living, the pleasure of remembrance, the hope that faces the future, the confidence—not too confident, however—that "there is a budding morrow in midnight"—all these things are proclaimed with an exultancy that is unfailingly serene. Emotion and intellect are finely harmonized. There are in these sonnets no signs of mere playing with the former or undue pride in the exhibition of the latter as mere cleverness. The poet is sincere with himself, and yet the strain of happiness is so frankly insistent that he cannot truly be called, in the ordinary sense of the term, serious. He is deliciously undidactic.

A characteristic of this tribute to woman, under the form of a glorification of the one woman, which will not be lost to the fine senses of those who, while appre-

ciating the banality and absurdity of recent superlative manifestations of feminism, nevertheless realize the enormity of the crime which civilization has committed against "the sex" in regarding it as wholly secondary to the masculine element, is the fact that, throughout this work, the wife is always treated as the companion of the husband. Rather let us say, in the good, warm sense, this poet's wife is his "chum." She is a woman who sees and hears and feels the gladness of earth and air and sky. She is a woman of the open air. She knows the trees, the birds, the signs of the changing seasons. No Eighteenth Century shepherdess she, but a modern American woman, enjoying such freedom as only the American woman knows. She is the central figure in an eminently healthful picture of life, and it is this fullness of health which keeps the sonnets clear of all morbidness. True, we have hints, now and again, of the immanence of death—that shadow upon all the joy of the world which, somehow, seems nevertheless to give to joy its uttermost poignancy—but the fact is accepted. The poet nor whimpers nor whines. He faces his fate. He has his love, and all this world

which that love glorifies, and love is, in its highest form, both hope and faith.

As to the technique of these sonnets, it were idle to maintain that it is faultless. Mr. McGaffey almost prides himself upon his assertion of a large ignorance of grammar and rhetoric. It is, therefore, well to say that, considering such self-confessed limitation, and considering also, that the sonnet is "a difficult and cloying form of verse," and that the form is necessarily a rigid restriction upon thought and feeling, this performance is almost miraculously artistic. There are few literary allusions, because the substance of the work comes straight from the heart and from Nature, and not from books. It is felt, not echoed from other poets. Defective sonnets there are in this sequence, but the very defects, generally speaking, give the work a warmth, a color, a spontaneity which might have been utterly lost through too much concern with the abstrusities of syntax and prosody. It is easier to criticise these sonnets than to write sonnets that will compare with them. The poet is greater than the form to which he submits himself. His lyricism asserts itself

triumphantly always, and often in so doing it bursts the bonds of the form that is too compressed for it.

Here, then, are these "Sonnets to a Wife." They are sweet and clean and strong. They are the glorification of womanliness as, taken all in all, the finest thing in this, the only world we know. They honor goodness. They breathe tenderness and courage and a pantheistic piety. They are the happy mean between the ascetic and the sensual apprehension of life. They are the utterance of a sane passion for a good woman by a poet who is also a good man. They may not appeal to the taste that invariably prefers "Madam Bovary" to "The Vicar of Wakefield," but they will touch tenderly, and not the less surely, the hearts of all those who feel and know that true love is something more than a blind, bodily instinct or desire that we have in common with the beasts that perish.

William Marion Reedy.

Sonnets to a Wife

Life at its Best

Life at its best is but a troubled sea;
The ship is launched with snowy-spreading sail
To face the reefs, the billows and the gale,
And meet the perils that are yet to be.
The shore she left fades dimly in the lee
And on the beach the forms and faces fail;
Come what come may, or rain or sun or hail
The ship glides on, the mariner is free.

But Ah! what joy when backward o'er the foam
From stress of storms and far, unfriendly lands,
Held in the hollow of the sky's vast dome
To mark at last the well-remembered sands;
To know once more the harbor of a home
And welcome of a woman's outstretched hands.

The Wooing

Not with the thoughts of others do I seek
To wake your interest and hold it fast;
Not with a fancy from the buried past
Some honeyed fragment of the ancient Greek,
Have I essayed in halting form to speak,
But I have all such cunning outward cast
And trusted to the Saxon words at last
To light your eyes—put color in your cheek.

The simplest speech is truest; when I say
“I love you!” in those three words I have said
All that I know, or compass, or can feel.
Let those who will, adopt the tortuous way
The while their thought in speech obscure is led
Round, round and round, a wheel within a wheel.

In the Fields

When on the hills the golden sunlight lies,
And apple-trees are heavy with the snow
Of drifted bloom that shades the grass below,
While far above are realms of cloudless skies;
When overhead the wandering swallow flies
And butterflies in loops of color go;
Then, as we wait together, do I know
Some touch, some hint, some gleam of Paradise.

The sweet song-sparrow from the poplar sings
The swaying leaves put forth their emerald shields,
Each trembling blossom where the barred bee clings
Its store of sweets through drowsy hours yields;
What sense of life, what joy that almost stings,
With you and I there loitering in the fields.

Jealousy

If to be jealous is to hope to gain
Your every longing—make all other men
As misty to your memory as when
The shadows slip across a window-pane;
If to be jealous is to wish to reign
Your one true lover, chide me once again;
Call me as jealous as Othello then
And all your chiding will be given in vain.

For I am one who cannot hide my thought
And curb my tongue and make my cheek a liar;
The tissues of my nature was not wrought
Of lifeless clay, devoid of Pagan fire,
And long in storm and anguish have I sought
And now have found, at last, my Heart's Desire.

Books

Tomes from dull minds I oftentimes have read
And disquisitions of the great and wise,
And sought to learn the secrets of the skies
On wintry nights with starry scripture spread;
Through labyrinthian passage have I sped
Of romance and of deeds of high emprise,
But nothing found compared to your dear eyes
Nor poems like to what your lips have said.

To read a woman in the higher sense
Is quite beyond the power of men's wit ;
Who says he does is made of vain pretense,
And never can by wisdom benefit.
Her look is more than spoken eloquence—
Her voice the sweetest lyric ever writ.

Love Without Passion

Love without passion is a flower without sun,
Reft of the wind's touch, banished from the rain
Wrought against nature—therefore wrought in vain
However fine its tissue may be spun;
Its petals fade and wither one by one
And in the dust and under dust are lain;
Love without passion is the dying strain
From shattered lutes that all to minors run.

True love is as the rose; the roses glow
With life and color in the summer air.
The winds of Autumn through the garden blow,
The leaves are scattered and the vines are bare,
The snows depart, the grass springs up, and lo!
Again the ruddy rose is blooming there.

On the Hills

When in the valley where the river ran
And sunlight rippled on its current fair,
While shadowed vistas of Autumnal air
Re-echoed with the dying notes of Pan:
When twilight's herald came in night's dusk van,
While sank the sun in western splendor there,
What joy for you and me all this to share
Mid wooded glades and chords Æolian.

And in the hush that followed as we saw
The after-glow dye deep the waiting slopes,
While brooding silence hushed the sombre rills,
Then fell upon our hearts a happy awe
And light and shade of mingled fears and hopes,
Star-signalled on the ramparts of the hills.

Worship

Gods, idols, fetiches of wood and stone
 Of carven ivory and of beaten brass,
They rise and fall, they flourish and they pass,
Or stand disfigured in some desert lone;
Creeds come and go and on the sands are strown
 And wither like the winter-shaken grass,
And all such things are shadows on a glass
To this one love which I for you have known.

For in my pagan heart I hold you dear
 More than a miser might his store of gold,
Or ship-wrecked tar the rescuing sail unfurled.
In my religion you are worship here
 Beyond all gods or temples manifold,
The sole and only woman in the world.

Recollections

To conjure up old memories; to say,
"Do you remember that in such a June,
An orchard oriole sang us a tune
Melodiously from out a branching spray
Of leafy denseness; or on such a day
We saw the silver spectre of the moon
Long after dawn, and nearing unto noon,
A merest wraith of sickle gaunt and grey?"

These are love's echoes, faintly heard and fine
But ever-present, never dim nor mute,
That you and I in comradeship do share;
Sweet symphonies that breathe a sense divine
Like misty chords that linger by a lute,
Though all the silver strings are shattered there.

*W*omen

Of such a woman it may well be said
She has a graceful carriage; or is fair;
And of another she has golden hair
And praise the poise and beauty of her head;
Some women may be witty and well read
And some may charm by throats and bosoms bare.
All are Eve's daughters, all her power share
To conquer man and lead him by a thread.

But more than seeming grace or outward sign
Of loveliness that like a flower is seen,
Is what she keeps shrined sacred and apart;
Some glow of soul like sparkle in the wine
Some shadowy look, like Autumn pool serene,
The reflex of the pureness of her heart.

Ideals

Not rhapsodies for what we cannot reach
Nor longing for what lies beyond our power,
But just to make life lovely as a flower
By gift of tenderness in thought and speech;
Thus rain and dew their loving lessons teach
In lace-like gleam or sudden-dropping shower
And so shall we, through every passing hour,
Hold fast to higher visions, each for each.

Fidelity and courtesy; and touch
Of hopefulness to meet the coming years,
And strength to view the days that backward roll,—
These will I give you, and in pledging such
Cast off the shadows of all crowding fears,
And act a man's part truly, heart and soul.

In Idle Hours

In idle hours to backward look and see
 The tracery of wind across the grass,
 To mark the clouds that float in snowy mass
With myriad filmy pennants flowing free;
To hear a robin in the maple tree,
 And see the pool's reflection like a glass
 Where light and shade alternate come and pass,
With muffled mellow murmurings of the bee:

This is to drink of nature's brimming cup
 In woodland nooks of slumberous solitude,
 Where summer holds a golden beaker up
And all the earth by beauty's self is wooed;
Do you remember where the dead leaf fell,
 The violet's blue, the empty acorn shell?

Alone

The hum of many voices rises near
And from the road comes din of carriage-wheels;
Beyond are sails that draw the outbound keels
Which northward from the shimmering harbor steer;
And there are myriads of strange faces here
Smooth brows that happy childhood's hour reveals,
And wrinkled cheeks where care has stamped his seals
And wandering crowds by sea-wall and by pier.

And we beneath the cloudless summer sky
See all this gathering pass us in a stream,
Nor note the lights that on the water gleam
Nor white-winged gulls that seaward dip and fly;
We are alone—the rest is but a dream
In shadow-land we linger, you and I.

Music

A wind-song in the rushes, or a sigh
From Autumn's chorus in the naked trees,
The white-stoled chanting of the stately seas
Against a line of cliffs that tower high—
A plover's rippling whistle in the sky
Or wailing of the flutes in minor keys:
I in my time have harked to all of these
And reedyplash of waters lisping by.

But Oh! how harsh such chords must ever seem
Since in my heart I hear an echo come
More sweet and low than plaint of mourning-dove;
The reflex of the note that is my dream,
That music which makes other music dumb
The voice of the one woman whom I love.

A Woman's World

The man she loves; and all he means to her
Is what a woman's world is; in her way
Of living and of loving day by day
Sometimes her dreaming eyes will fill and blur
And memories of him will come to stir
Her heart-strings; as a blossom's self might sway
When through the scented, flowery paths of May
Drift down the echoes of the winds that were.

The little things are what she treasures most;
Sweet, subtle courtesies of hand and speech,
For these the lover's attitude still teach
Better than costly gift or idle boast;
As one who reckons, not without his host,
Holding her near and dear, yet out of reach.

By Moonlight

In shadow-haunted hush of lonely place
With ripples lapping by the reedy shores,
And glint of stars along the watery floors
I see again the profile of your face;
The moonlight trailed across your wrist like lace
Then disappeared behind its cloudy doors,
While we sat idly, with the idle oars
Twixt earth and sky, as balancing in space.

How strange and beautiful to us it seemed,
Held in the hollow of the night to float,
With muffled liquid whisperings round the boat
While overhead the constellations dreamed;
Some faint-heard rustle from the distant sands
And silence brooding o'er our close-locked hands.

Companionship

The sense of comradeship which now we feel

Grew slowly as an oak does, and as strong.

For now to one another we belong

In all that makes a man and woman leal;

Our lives are linked as firm as welded steel

And in our thoughts sweet harmonies do throng.

Like half-remembered echoes of a song

As days and nights above our pathway wheel,

So do the perfume and the joy of days

Live with us and the season's sway dispute.

Spring, Summer, Autumn, they may go their ways

And bring nor bud nor blossom an it suit;

Yet what reck we, beside the wintry fire

Sitting alone, I and my Heart's Desire?

Apart

Bleak, bitter hours, when separate we knew
Days when the sun sank glowing in the west,
And quietly the shadows onward pressed
Until the twilight blotted out the blue.
The first faint stars came slowly to the view
And home-bound birds flew silent to their nest,
While swift as light our thoughts in eager quest
Pierced outward, yours to me and mine to you.

Now in the years when we together dream
Those days apart have lost their sombre look;
Mere dog-eared pages of Time's well-thumbed book
And not to us belonging do they seem.
Thus fate at last hath offered full amends
And made those lovers who were once but friends.

Apple Trees

First to our sight their branches brown and bare
Stood naked in the days of early spring,
Where haply showed the brilliant azure wing
Of some conceited jay-bird roaming there;
And then came May, and all the waiting air
Was white with dainty blossoms quivering
With hordes of bees that gathered there to cling,
And all those honeyed sweets to claim and share.

But best of all was in the days of June,
When thick and full the canopy of leaves
Put back the sun with sheltering emerald eaves,
And housed us from the fervent light of noon;
How happily we told there in the shade
Of dreams of one another, unafraid.

Reserve

Some men proclaim their love and let it go
In pitiful wild words that all may see,
How they have sighed, or bended low the knee.
God's will be done; I was not fashioned so;
I know what utter love, is and I know
What this our life together holds for me,
But keep it sacred, as not meant to be
Flung gossip-ward, to the four winds that blow.

I marvel at those singers who aspire
To lay their souls bare to the rabble throng;
For you my lips have trembled into song
And you shall judge if I lack aught of fire,
If that my heart-beats have not rung like chimes
Within the echoing transept of these rhymes.

Vanity

To be as charming in your husband's sight
As erst you were when he your lover came,
Go linger by the mirror's polished frame
And put all weariness to uſter flight;
Come with a smile and let your eyes be bright,
Be gay, be sad, but never be the same;
And thus your lover you may always claim
Else lost mayhap by holding him too light.

An this be vanity—to add a rose
To glow upon your bosom, train your hair
So in his eyes you may be passing fair—
Why, let it stand; a woman better knows
That careless hands and sloven taste in dress
May mar the spell of her own loveliness.

In the Woods

Deep in the glimmering depths of woods to wait
Where countless leaves with every breeze unfold,
To watch the sunshine weave its thread of gold
Where tree trunks stand in tall alignment straight;
To hear the flicker challenging his mate
With chattering note, far-piercing clear and bold,
And mark how dimly in the forest old
The lights and shadows softly palpitate;

And there, shut closely from the outer world
To lie on some green slope and idly dream,
Touch hands, and smile, while over us unfurled
The leafy banners of the noontide gleam—
That was to find the Ponce de Leon spring
Of youth, and hope, and blossoms burgeoning.

Gold

There is a gold unlocked by miser's key
And gold is found in lees of sparkling wine,
And there is gold along the swaying vine
Where yellow half-blown roses drooping be;
Gold and to spare among the sands at sea
And palest gold in saffron stars that shine;
And gold deep-digged from many a hidden mine
And golden leaves upon the willow tree.

But all this aureate glitter is for naught
When I in dreamful mood my love behold,
Crowned with her tangled locks of tawny gold
Like corn-silk in the breeze's meshes caught.
None other gold may match it, none so fair
As that which gathers in a woman's hair.

To My Wife

I as an actor, have played well my part,
Not showing how the sons of men I scorn;
Those shriveled, greedy souls who crave the corn
The oil and wine, the treasures of the mart;
Deep in my soul I burn the flame for Art
As one who was a lyric poet born,
As one who leads a singer's hope forlorn
Yet with unshrinking and unconquered heart.

I can exist on what a Spartan can;
Endure as granite; smile when friends do fail;
Face Poverty, and see the years grow stale
Or bide my time with any sort of man.
Full in the teeth of Fate I fling the glove—
Come age, come death, while I have you my love!

A Woman's Love

If I have fought my baser self and raised
My thoughts to high ideals, it is due
To this the love that I have found in you

As I in your dear eyes have longing gazed.

When I look back I find myself amazed
At what I was; what mire I floundered through,
So far I wandered from the pure and true
While all my good intentions fitful blazed.

A man is half a savage, and he needs
The woman's presence to arouse his soul.

Her love has given the world his noblest deeds,
She is the light that warns him from the shoal—
The reefs—the rocks—where fell destruction leads
And dark engulfing waters silent roll.

Midsummer

The red-winged black-bird whistled from the reeds
The cat-tail stalks rose thickly straight and tall,
By meadow-slopes rang sweet a carnival
Of bobolinks down-fluttering on the meads;
From ribbon-grass and downy road-side weeds
Fine powdered particles of dust would fall,
And where the sun shone, through an old stone
wall
Danced in its light a myriad of seeds.

Then came a hush in Nature—one that fell
Like shadows on the leaves, so soft it seemed,
Or like that pause which follows when a bell
Peals, and is silent; and we sat and dreamed,
While all around the waters wove their spell
And far above the cloudless azure gleamed.

Sisterhood

All women born are sisters; low or high,

Good, bad, indifferent or how you name
Your silk-beruffled and most haughty dame
Whose gilded carriage rumbles slowly by,
Your drunken courtesan with hair awry,

Barred, marred and scarred by branding irons of
shame.

Lo! in their childhood they were all the same,
And have no false distinctions when they die.

Oh! sisters, to your own sex most unkind,

How will it fare you when you waste your breath
And sink like bubbles in the sea of Death,
If to your sisters you were deaf and blind?

Remember His forgiveness, which sufficed
For Magdalen, who washed the feet of Christ!

Water-Lilies

We rowed the boat among them as they lay
Pale lilies, snowy and with hearts of gold,
That sprang from under depths of oozy mould
And starred the waters of a Summer day;
And I remember after, that in play
 You wound them round your forehead fold on fold,
And feigned you were a Naiad, shy and cold
Or water-sprite, or mocking woodland fay.

Yet an you were a Naiad, this I know
 That you were courted by the amorous sun,
Who kissed your creamy lilies one by one
Till they had drooped beneath his fervent glow;
But ere they withered in the twilight there
 They left their gold hearts tangled in your hair.

Love's Philosophy

A rock stands harmless from a little rain
But many storms will wear its strength away;
And thus in life when men and women say
Those bitter words which hasten strife and pain,
And still repeat till hope of peace is vain;
Lo! as the hour-glass sands divide the day
So these small things have parted them for aye,
And Love through such harsh means itself hath slain.

A venom'd adder is the human tongue
When tipped with anger, be it either sex;
And who when stirred with controversy, reck's
How deep or keen the cruel words have stung?
Curb then the lips and emulate the dove,
Lest wounding one whose life is in your love.

To the Woman

To lead, not drive him, is the wiser plan
For tactfulness will tame him all the years,
And tenderness, not tyranny he fears,
For men were ever but a stubborn clan;
And long ago since first the world began
And stars rose dimly in the primal spheres,
A little wit, diplomacy, and tears.—
What havoc have they wrought with every man!

So shall you conquer, as the gentle rain,
Soothing his vanity to gain your ends,
Moulding his wishes till they meet your own;
Thus as a child his confidence you gain
For still to flattery his heart unbends,—
Only a child, a little larger grown.

To the Man

If you a woman would desire to hold
Faithful and true, and guided by your will,
Be sure no art, nor flattery's fine skill
Shall e'er deceive her, nor will gifts or gold;
By love alone her spirit is controlled,
This is her law, her Deity, until
The light falls pale upon her forehead still
The red lips ashen, and the heart grown cold.

So shall you woo her if you wish to win
Her heart and soul, to wear her like a flower
To drain her kisses, and keep back her tears;
Filling with love the space she lingers in;
Making her dream of you each passing hour
With utter longing through the iron years.

Morning

The kildee's cry along the sandy shore
The pine-tops in the distance, and a still
Far sense of brooding on each wooded hill;
The fallen trunk of a huge sycamore
Around whose roots the river's waters pour,
And everywhere a subtle dawning thrill
That grows, and spreads, and palpitates until
The red sun peeps above the eastern door.

What joy to stand above our vantage ground
Beneath the shade of overhanging beech;
To drink in every chord of sylvan sound
Learning the lessons that the woods can teach;
Our hearts and souls by sympathy thus bound
And happy more in thought and less in speech!

Two Loves

If, loving you, I sometimes seem as sad
Or dull, or tinged with hint of sober mood,
It is because I feel my life renewed
Having your love; and still my treasures add
As misers do; and what of woe I've had
No more with its gaunt shadows may intrude;
Thus silence fills the happy interlude
While I sit wordless, worshiping, and glad.

A boy's love and a man's love intertwined
I give to you to govern all the time,
Whether it run to reason or to rhyme.
The passion and the purity combined;
The man's love, strong to fight and work and plan,
The boy's, to wake the lover in the man.

On a Country Road

A whitened length of grayish dust that leads
Past a rough bridge where grape-vines idly trail;
From distant woods the whistle of a quail
And butterflies that flit above the weeds.
Horizonward a bluish haze recedes
And flaunts a snowy cloud-shape like a sail;
The scent of strawberries along a swale
Comes pungently to anyone who heeds.

How slowly and how joyous passed that day,
The wayside roses climbing in a throng;
The far-brought odor of the new-mown hay
The cherries dangling as we rode along;
And cheering us along the homeward way
The sweet-wrought flutings of the robin's song!

Re-incarnation

The flower you gathered, blossomed long ago
Warmed by past sunshine, jeweled with the rain
Of bygone years; the river's liquid strain
Which now you hear, was once the purling flow
Of a lost stream; the very winds that blow
Have come and gone, will come and go again;
And where the primal grass has decked the plain
Year after year the later grasses grow.

And thus with every line that lovers trace;
However dear, or passionate the word,
The self-same thought, in a dead bosom stirred
Has brought the roses to some woman's face;
And all the worship that my rhyming brings
Is but an echo of forgotten things.

Analysis

To weigh as in a finely balanced scale
Each thought and action that the season brings,
Is but to fret the spirit with those things
Which after all are of the least avail.
It is enough to know we shall not fail
In all the sweet and high imaginings,
The nobler thoughts which lend to Love his wings
Though Time and Fate and even Death assail.

Analysis is common, and may seem
Through instances, conclusive as the leaf
Borne to the Ark by the returning dove;
But oftentimes may prove to be a theme
Which sends the worm of jealousy and grief
To blight the blossom of a perfect love.

Tact

A woman's crowning glory is her tact,
The art of knowing when and what to say;
When to be grave, indifferent, or gay,
And seem so charming in her every act
That, as a magnet, she will men attract
And easily compel them to her sway.
So shall she rule, or golden hair or gray,
The subtlest type of womanhood in fact.

For tact is more than beauty, more than wit,
Akin to genius, and the sum of all
Which makes the woman who is blessed with it
A Queen by right, in hovel or in hall;
Sweet as the honeyed lines by poet writ,
And true as rings the wild-bird's madrigal.

In Idleness

To lie upon the grass and watch the herds
Deep standing in the river, and to see
The barred gold glisten on the bumble-bee
And note the noisy gossip of the birds;
To mark the blue horizon-rim that girds
That purple world beyond, Infinity—
Under the shade of a wild-cherry tree
To wait and listen, hampered not by words.

This was our gladness on a long June day
Companionship by the lazy lapse of hours,
While ebbed the slow, enchanted time away
Where bird-songs came, like intermittent showers,
And drowsy sweet upon us where we lay,
The perfume of the elderberry flowers.

A Burden of Vain Wishes

A burden of vain wishes: hopes that died
Vague dreams of fame and wraiths of brave renown
Pass in the sunlight, motes that vanish down
Beyond me, standing on this old hill-side,
And disappear in circling vistas wide
Like Autumn leaves that scatter, worn and brown
When Summer lays aside her tattered crown,
And sombre winds and rusted fields abide.

A burden of vain wishes! Nay, not so!
Your hand-clasp is my haven and my hope,
Your love and faith the utmost gross and scope
Of dreams and fact—this at the last I know,
Here, waiting while the sunset's after-glow
Burns like a torch in valley and on slope.

Wisdom

There is a culture deeper far than books
And intellect beyond the ken of schools;
Wise sayings sometimes on the lips of fools
And knowledge stored in many quiet nooks.
A woman is as cultured as she looks,
Speaks, acts, and smiles, and merely bookish rules
She well may scorn as being clumsy tools
With which dull fishers file their rusty hooks.

This intellect that scholars prattle of
Why, what does it accomplish? Every age
Has witnessed through the perfidy of Love
How woman shows the folly of the sage.
Nay! then, Sir Oracle, reserve thy wit
Some woman's eyes shall give thee need of it.

Lost Days

The tapestry of shadows—ghosts of dreams
That flickered through the silence and were gone,
Lost days that we together leaned upon
Have faded, and the recollection seems
As dim as sunken starlight in the streams,
When on a Summer night reflections wan
From cloudy heights to watery depths are drawn,
To glimmer in the current's under-gleams.

Lost days, but cherished; mirrored in a haze
Of threadbare seasons, Winter, Autumn, Spring,
And Summer with her moss-begirdled ways
And flash and flutter of a bird's soft wing;
But who shall pierce the labyrinthian maze
To tell us where their shades are wandering?

Evening

The tree-toad's call from branches dead and green,
And from the grass a cricket's rasping cry;
An afterglow across the Eastern sky
Red as a far-flung fire-brand's ruddy sheen;
The lapping of swift ripples shot between
Old logs that rigid in the current lie,
The shadow of our boat that passes by
Above brown sands that dimly now are seen.

This was to float with silence and the night
Wove through the mesh of twilight like a strand;
To note the twisting of the bat's weird flight
And glint of fire-flies on the shelving sand,
To be removed from earthly essence quite
Two shadows drifting into shadow-land.

Youth

Age is not always given with gray hair
Nor youth encompassed in the fewest years;
Since doubt and pain with their attendant tears
Are dauntless etchers of the lines of care;
Youth is most present in the joys we share
As swift or slow the season disappears,—
The verve, the gladness which puts by all fears,
The hopes we nourish and the smiles we wear.

I think of you as always being young
Untouched by Sorrow and unworn by Time,
Spring's blossoms opening in your tender smile;
Like her of whom the elder Bards have sung,
Chanting her praise in many a noble rhyme—
Like Cleopatra by Egyptian Nile.

Tapestry

In the deep twilight when my random thought
Weaves in the silence and surrounding shade
Webs of odd fancies, glittering like brocade,
Or sombre woof of darker musings brought;
Then have the hours with mystery still fraught
Full on the wall a motley texture laid,
Within the loom of darkness spun and made
In divers hues together firmly wrought.

And all the warp of this weird spinning seems
Forever old and yet forever new;
With rusted spots and sudden golden gleams
A subtle blending of the false and true;
The dull threads hinting of my wasted dreams
The bright ones telling of my love for you.

Sumach

We climbed the slope above the valley's edge;
Behind, the country road, a ribbon lay
Of powdery dust down-winding dim and gray;
A bird sang sweetly from a thorny hedge
And ripples circled in the river sedge,
While brown October dozed the hours away;
And northward and beyond the hillside clay
The clustering sumach flamed along a ledge.

The life of ruddy Autumn filled its veins
Deep-glowing masses glinting in the sun,
redder than the wild strawberry, where it stains
The woodland ways mid light and shadow spun;
A gorgeous dream, a color-draught divine,
Spilled on the golden afternoon like wine.

Love-Letters

Let the light flame consume them and be done
While their charred fragments in the embers lie,
The old, sweet record of the days gone by.
Read them and burn them, lingering, one by one;
The swift months gather and the seasons run
With none to tell us of the when or why;
Let them as ashes vanish in the sky,
Since this our courtship has but just begun.

Better to miss them when we parted be
Than through some fault or lapsing of the years,
To have them made a target for the sneers
Or jest, or scorn, of Curiosity;
For there are those who tear such things apart
To feast and mumble on a human heart.

Spring

The sleet drives sharply on the window-panes
And naked trees like scaffolds darkly stand;
The iron grasp of winter on the land
Locks fields and streams in glittering icy chains;
The north-wind wails in keen Polaric strains
And dead leaves dance a ghostly saraband,
While cloud-fleets dim, by shapes fantastic manned
Sail westward where the sunset coldly wanes.

But by the blaze of our red-glowing grate
We see beyond the armored line of eaves,
And mark the flashing of a flicker's wing;
And violets in the blue flames seem to wait,
While shining through a mist of emerald leaves,
Beckons and laughs the sweet, fresh face of Spring.

The Flight of Time

The flight of Time will through the cycles wing
And one age follow on another's path;
The leaves of May will feel November's wrath
And January blossom into Spring;
And side by side we, onward wandering,
Shall learn the lesson that each season hath,
The bud and shard, the glow and aftermath
The hopes that vanish and the dreams that cling.

A day is like a swallow's shadow cast
On sleeping waters; for an instant there
Etched by the restless pinion in mid-air,
Vague and elusive as the fleeting past;
So let us cleave to gladness in our day
While Time, that miser, hoards the years away.

Late Violets

Fast-hidden in October's grassy swales
Late violets lay; we found them, you and I,
While gusty winds unbridled galloped by
And smoky Indian-summer filled the vales;
And when the grass divided in the gales
They glinted there like bits of Autumn sky,
Then disappeared, as sylvan fairies shy
When clamor rude their close retreat assails.

Late violets; blue as deep-sea depths unstirred,
They nestled there, and heard the pulse of earth
Reverberate within its hollow girth
Like to a giant echo, faint and blurred;
And far beyond the sweep of Winter's wing
We saw their paler sisters of the Spring.

Autumn Reveries

Along the slopes the fading stubbles show
And in the woods a purple vapor swims,
While hickory-nuts from the wind-shaken limbs
Drop down and nestle in the leaves below;
The sumach burns with ever-deepening glow
And shadows lurk about the shallow rims
Of silent pools; while eastward slowly dims
The penciled flight of a departing crow.

And you and I here on this russet hill
Drink deep the beaker of Autumnal wine
Held to our lips, and feel the nameless thrill
That ebbs and flows in changing shade and shine;
The breeze is dead; the trees are rapt and still
As pilgrims kneeling at a desert shrine.

Rosemary

Rosemary for remembrance—may this be
A leaf where treasured happiness is sealed
Unknown to others; which to us will yield
(Our memory the magic opening key)
A fragrant scent of the lost days set free
A music to our listening ears revealed;
As a rough shell, that sometimes holds concealed
The mystic murmurous secret of the sea.

For something to the written line belongs
Beyond the word that's uttered; through the pen
This verse, mayhap, shall come to live again
And take its place among remembered songs;
When you and I, and all our love and trust
Are blended into long-forgotten dust.

Dawn

The grey dawn flooded in the lonely room
That mourned your absence; on the western wall
The sallow shafts of sunbeams struck, to fall
As sadly as they would across a tomb;
A shadow in the corner was a plume
That night had dropped from off her sable pall;
A thorny rose stood leafless in the hall,
Your going thus had robbed it of its bloom.

The very pictures were aware of this
As silver-stoled and silent slowly came
The first reluctant messengers of Dawn;
Of all you are, and all you are to miss
Byron seemed speaking from his oval frame,
And Greek Aspasia whispered, "she is gone!"

Noon

The book I hold within my idle clasp
Is closed, and sealed, for aught I care indeed;
My mind has now no leisure hour to read
No tale of love, nor old romance to grasp;
My thoughts hang shattered, as a broken hasp
And touch of hands not Fancy's touch I need;
For since you left my heart begins to bleed
Where Memory has pierced it like an asp.

To love you and to lose you for a day
A loss irreparable to me it seems—
The sting of Fate, the worm that never dies.
I cannot live to have you long away
And see, alas! as only in my dreams,
The light of recognition in your eyes.

Night

What shadows troop across the fading floor
 What hush floats ever as the shadows turn!
Like ashes brooding in a sullen urn
Mocking the shades of those who went before,
My thoughts lie heavy, and I dream no more
 But ever for your absent face I yearn;
 And grudgingly my sombre lesson learn
Of waiting for your footstep at the door.

Mayhap my wish is selfish; just to see
 Your hand in mine; to know that you are here
 Close, with the lyrics of your tears or smiles;
I cannot say what this will mean to me
 Nor all the ways in which I hold you dear,
 Across this void of unrelenting miles.

Anniversary

This is that day of days when, long ago,
We stood together by an ancient man
And heard him drone about the Scriptural plan
Which plighted men and women here below;
And westward burned the Autumn afterglow
While scarlet vines across the branches ran,
And flying leaves, a russet caravan
Fled down the vales in rustling overflow.

I scarcely recollect the spoken words,
Nor care I for the ceremony vain
Which said, forsooth, that God had made us one,
Since Love had mated us as mate the birds—
And on the windows was the West's bright stain
The parting benediction of the sun.

Happiness

Not to be happy in our own conceit
Of faith, and truth, and well-remembered days
In breezy woods and empty, pastoral ways,
Where the brown waves of leaves Autumnal beat;
But more to wish that other souls may meet
And find their comrades in this earthly maze;
That men and women, like to us, will gaze,
Each in each other's eyes and find life sweet.

When you and I together silent wait
Not only do these thoughts of Thee and Me,
Knock at our hearts, as at an inner gate,
But through the wonder and the mystery,
Deep in our dreams we pray a kindly fate;
For lovers past, and lovers yet to be.

In Days to Come

In days to come, when we are old and gray
Bent with the years and disciplined by Time,
Trembling and feeble we will scan this rhyme
Whose light for us has almost dimmed away,
And haply then remember, if we may,
Some sweet suggestion of our youth sublime,
Some keen reminder which like bruised thyme
Shall bring the memory of our Summer day.

There is no life but loving; naught but Youth
To make love perfect; when the rose-leaves fall
The perfume withers, while the birds are dumb.
And thus indeed I could in very truth
Pray that we both might early yield this thrall.
And so lose Winter in the days to come.

Hero-Worship

To every man some doting woman lends
A halo of enchantment; in her eyes
He is most noble, loving, brave and wise;
This worship like to incense pure ascends
And with her dreams in painted glamour blends
Like rainbow melting in the western skies;
His lightest word is something dear to prize
His chance caress for sorrow full amends.

Oh, mystery! that woman cannot see
Her own superiority to man,
Which soars on high like eagle's wing above—
Just as it was, has been, will ever be,
Because ordained by God's primeval plan,
Her greater faith, fidelity and love.

Waiting

To picture you when far apart from me,
To guess how you might occupy the day;
Whether the moments slowly glide away
And if the hours or swift or tedious be;
And never from this patient vigil free,
But like a statue in the sculptor's clay
Musing and brooding, or as Moslems pray,
Stretching my hands through silence out to thee.

There is so little time, Love, after all,
To walk together; such a little while
Before our lives will melt as in a breath;
How soon, alas, the leaves of April fall!
How much I miss the joyance of your smile,
And waiting seems the bitterness of death.

Dreams

Not always have we prudent sowed the seed
Of thoughts prosaic, as to wisely reap,
The less impassioned memories that keep
Our lives more commonplace in word and deed;
For Fancy sometimes blows upon her reed
And Romance dimly rises, half-asleep,
While over heart and brain and spirit sweep
Faint chords, like wings from mystic cages freed.

Either a song of gladness or of tears
In sunshine rippling or on shadow cast,
Thus to our ears this mocking music seems;
Something to listen for through flying years
Rapt echoes of the future or the past,
The respite and the recompense of dreams.

Affinity

The sparks fly always upward, and my soul
Spreads wings to meet yours, as its one true mate,
Whether the paths be blossom-crowned or strait
Whether in gladness or in bitter dole;
No voice but yours can soothe me, or control,
No words save yours my ways illuminate;
I am content to follow, lead or wait,
My eyes fixed ever on the distant goal.

Not oak and vine are we, but lovers twain
Who face the world together side by side,
And so shall bide until our latest breath;
In storm or shine, in burning sun or rain
Through life's long ways in comradeship allied,
Not to be parted by the hands of death.

Laughter

The touch of mirth still cherish, as is best,
Laughter, with lips slow-spreading to a smile;
What were this world without the quip and wile
The cap and bells, the old time-honored jest?
Welcome the coming, speed the departing guest;
And still with merriment the way beguile.
A little joy shall last the longest while.
Be gay, look up, be merry with the rest.

For mark the limpid quibbles of the streams,
The joyousness that sunshine scatters far,
The crooning exultation of the sea!
Better be glad with careless John-a-Dreams
Than linger where the sober sages are
And lose the wiser sense of jollity.

Sanctuary

As from the toil and turmoil of the world
I come to bring good fortune or defeat,
And once again your loving eyes to meet,
Then droops the rest, like a lone banner furled
By idle winds; for all my thoughts are whirled
Toward you, like a cloud of swallows fleet;
And all the cares that follow at my feet
Like wraiths against the darkness back are hurled.

Home is where love is, and no doubt can pierce
That inner space where you and I do dwell,
Nor cast a lurking shadow on its floor;
However beats the tide beyond us fierce
However prowls, with ululating yell,
The ever-watchful wolf beside the door.

In the Beech Woods

Broad screens, which shut the dawnlight from the earth
Of emerald leaves dense woven thick across;
And under foot were strips of velvet moss
That sloped around the beech-tree's mighty girth.
No bird-song breaking into sudden mirth
But silence, and a sadness for such loss,
With here and there a shred of sunlight's gloss
To lighten up the forest's flowerless dearth.

So must the Eden garden once have stood
When Adam and his bride went on their way:
No birds nor flowers in the pleasant wood
But sombre aisles, and solemn spaces gray.
Do you remember how we found it there?
A green cathedral, ghostly-still and bare!

Contentment

To glean the fields of life and take the grain
With thorns or poppies as the gods decree;
To lightly jest at Winter's wrath and see
Flowers in frost upon the window-pane;
To build our airy castle-walls in Spain,
However bare the near surroundings be—
This is the secret of content; the key
Which men have given all the world to gain.

We find it where the sun and shadows meet
In sylvan spaces cloistered from the town,
Where vague, yet clear, its presence may be seen;
It rustles in the dead leaves at our feet
It catches at the ruffle of your gown,
And beckons on with happy eyes serene.

Sorrow

The saving grace of sorrow has been ours
So that this present happiness is sweet;
Yea! doubly so, since long ago our feet
Were pierced by thorns, and seldom touched by flowers;
Past sadness with a rarer joy endowers
These days in which our pulses higher beat;
Like blossoms which uplift, the sun to greet
After the stress of sudden chilling showers.

Fire tempers steel; and thus the test of pain
Shall make souls steadfast, and the true heart strong
And bring tranquility from stormy years;
Life's bitter lessons are not learned in vain
And rightly runs the burden of the song,
"They lightest laugh who knew the touch of tears."

In Winter Paths

The tumbled drifts like fixed and frozen seas
Are billowed up around us, all in white,
The swirling winds on leafless branches smite
And round about the trunks of naked trees
Flit restlessly the black-capped chickadees;
Shy bits of grey, in brief and silent flight;
The woods are blacker than at dead of night
And under icy shields the waters freeze.

But yonder was a spray where on a time
The robin sang; in that lone reach remote
Wild violets gathered, bluer than the sea;
Nor shall this dearth banish the water's rhyme
The green of the grass, the blue-bird's April note,
While side by side you wander here with me.

Steadfastness

We will not dread the future nor the past.

There is enough to live for day by day,

Time and to spare for either work or play

And the long slumber coming at the last;

God and Eternity are much too vast

To fret us while we linger by the way.

Sometimes we shall be sad, and sometimes gay,
But heart with heart, and hand in hand stand fast.

* Let others seek the solace of the shrine

Under the gilded and inscribed dome

That shuts from sight the far blue heavens above;
For us the essence of the true divine,

The human joys that touch and sweeten home—

And that denied the angels—which is Love.

Pictures

There have been pictures that were reckoned fair
In ancient times by cunning painters wrought,
And far across the tides of ocean brought
To hang at last like jewels old and rare
In stately halls; but none that would compare
To some one woman, by the Graces taught,
With roses at her bosom, perfume-fraught
And motes of golden sunlight in her hair.

Time picks the crumbling canvas into shreds
Till, dust at length it sinks in the abyss,
And with the winds in errant circle blows;
But ere Fate comes to snip the tightened threads
There is no picture which is like to this—
The one fair woman—at her breast a rose.

Shadows

If we are naught but shadows, as they say,
Seen briefly as a sunset while we pass,
If life is tinkling cymbals—sounding brass—
And love a dream that quickly fades away—
Fate may not rob us; we have had our day;
Have heard the music and have drained our glass;
And if we are to perish as the grass
Death cannot quench the spark which lit our clay.

For Love beyond all else is vestal flame
That burns forever, constant as is Time
Steadfast and bright as is the Northern star;
And when, like mist, we vanish as we came,
Mayhap our passion shall imbue this rhyme
With life for others, shadows though we are.

Notes.

Notes

The twentieth sonnet of the sequence as it appeared in the first edition is an emendation by the author. As the sonnets appeared serially in the *St. Louis Mirror*, the twentieth was as follows:

At the Window

A measure of slow musing, and a dream
Of other days that to her heart has sped;
A yard below where grasses thickly spread
Lie out like velvet in the sunlight's gleam;
Blue-dappled skies with clouds as wan as cream,
And in the streets, a wandering, noisy thread
Of wheels and voices, down and outward led,
That ripples past the window in a stream.

But now a footstep echoes up the street
And drops the thimble from her finger there,
The quickened pulses of the day swift beat
And sunshine nestles in her tawny hair;
He looks above, as hoping not in vain—
Her face appears, a flower at the pane.

In the first, 1901, edition the thirty-fifth sonnet was as follows:

Selfishness

I want no child to take one jot from me
Of this, your love; no helpless clinging hands
To hold their place as strong as iron bands.
I'd lock your heart and throw away the key.
As now you are, so I would have you be
Till from Life's glass should fall the latest sands;
Till on the hearth the ultimate dull brands
Fade out, and leave us to Eternity.

I know the children's power; and I know
Your soul would flower and blossom to a child;
And loving you, I would not have it so
Lest I of my sole treasure were beguiled;
To learn that bitter lesson, late in life,
How far a mother loves beyond a wife.

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